

The Future of EPA's Environmental Indicators Initiative and Report on the Environment

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EPA recently published its first ever Draft Report on the Environment (ROE) to describe what we know—and don't know—about the current state of the environment at the national level and how it is changing. The Draft ROE relies on indicators—measures of environmental results—to describe status and trends in the environment and human health using the Indicators Hierarchy. It consists of a public report written for a lay audience and a technical document written for environmental professionals that provides the scientific underpinnings for the public report. The data supporting the indicators comes from a wide range of government and private organizations and must meet strict data-quality objectives.

Our goal is to insure that indicators provide early signals of emerging environmental problems, successful trends, and continuing problems and are the basis for Agency strategic planning. To do so, they must be deemed credible and informative by internal and external decision makers. The FY 03 Draft ROE was an important first step, but EPA envisions a number of improvements when it releases the next report, planned for FY06. The indicators initiative seeks extensive regular external and internal outreach to strengthen partnerships, to build an ROE process that “fits” and informs planning and performance measurement, develops analytical capacity to support regular reporting, conducts research to fill indicator gaps, and powers ROE data and indicators with IT/IM. Upcoming projects to accomplish these goals include partner/stakeholder and science review, alignment of indicators where appropriate with GPRA measures, analysis of indicator gaps and development of a data collection strategy to fill critical gaps, assessment of regional scale indicators, and development of a concept paper for an electronic Report on the Environment.